

**Variations of Postmodernity in Europe:
PoMo Profile Results from a Student Conference Context**

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The Flavor of Postmodernism among Students for Christ

Introduction

For the past ten years, students from a variety of countries in Europe gather together for the College of Student Ministry (CSM), a training program dedicated to helping university students of Europe become leaders on their campuses and later in their communities and the commercial world. This year 55 students and staff met at Continental Bible College in Brussels Belgium for two weeks in August to participate in one of three classes that were offered, Isaiah, Institute of Campus Ministry, and Ministry to Postmoderns. Students came from Poland, the US, Netherlands, Germany and France. Observing students from the different cultures and language groups in a close connected setting (they participate in small groups, worship teams and work teams, not to mention fun and table fellowship) makes it obvious the incredible differences in learning, communicating, worshiping, playing, cleaning. . . styles. Our goal during this time is to create a community that is truly connected through spiritual experiences as well as practical and teaching experiences. Not an easy task with language and cultural barriers.

Successfully working in a multicultural context requires acute awareness of the differences and skills to build bridges between the participants. This knowledge is never static, but is forcefully dynamic depending on what groups are participating, and the changes taking place within nations themselves. For instance, one of our biggest challenges has been to integrate east and west Germans in conferences and retreats as they pass through the turbulent reunification years.

Europeans are often described as post-Christian and postmodern. When asking a European student about postmodernism, most of them respond with 'what's that?' Perhaps it is like asking a child what air is, or a fish what water is. The definition that is

helpful when referring to Europeans is “Postmodernism refers to an intellectual mood and an array of cultural expressions that call into question the ideals, principles, and values that lay at the heart of the modern mind-set.” (Grenz 1996,12)

Throughout Europe modernity has had vastly different flavors: the atheistic socialism of eastern Europe, the Catholicism and radical humanism in France and reformation in northern Europe. Spain and Portugal with their radical Catholic stronghold were perhaps never truly modern. (Couchman, 2003) Can it be postulated that different flavors of postmodernism therefore exist?

Research Methodology

A question such as this could be a doctoral thesis in itself. However to get a tiny idea if postmodernism is different and if so how, the students at CSM took the Postmodern Profile developed by Dr. Earl Creps. The test was designed to test six dimensions that reveal a person’s inclination towards modernity or postmodernity. For each dimension, ten suppositions are posed, five of which describe a more modern paradigm of reality and five a postmodern one. (See Chart 1) By rating the degree to which a person identifies with each supposition, the postmodern/modern bias is revealed (Creps 2001, Personal Pomo Profile).

The participants in the survey were French (8) and German (14) students, all within their twenties. The two groups differed from each other in that the German students were mostly first generation Christians and homogenous in their ethnic backgrounds. The French however, were a reflection of the population of France. Two were black but had grown up in France, two were African students in France, one had a Brazilian background, and three were white French. The French were also products of the

French Assemblies of God church rather than student ministry, and had a more traditional view of Christianity. One of the women even covered her head when praying, an interesting Catholic remnant in the Assemblies of God churches. Although other participants took the test, I did not include them in the results because of their nationalities.

Chart 1: Dimensions of Personal Pomo Profile

	<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Modern Bias</i>	<i>Postmodern Bias</i>	
Pomo Profile	<i>Attitude</i>	Optimism	Pessimism	Results
	<i>Self</i>	Inauthentic	Authentic	
	<i>Identity</i>	Individual	Communal	
	<i>Knowing</i>	Rational	Experiential	
	<i>Truth</i>	Absolute	Relative	
	<i>Culture</i>	Uniformity	Pluralism	

Chart 2: Average scores of German and French students for each of the six dimensions of Personal Postmodernity.¹

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>German Ave</i>	<i>French Ave</i>
<i>Pessimistic</i>	3.6286	3.925
<i>Optimistic</i>	4.5143	4.475
<i>Authentic</i>	4.2429	3.7
<i>Inauthentic</i>	3.3143	4.175
<i>Communal</i>	4.0857	4.225
<i>Individual</i>	3.8286	3.875
<i>Experiential</i>	4.4286	4.225
<i>Rational</i>	4.0857	5.225
<i>Relative Truth</i>	3.7857	3.625
<i>Absolute Truth</i>	4.5	4.575
<i>Pluralistic Culture</i>	3.9	4.15
<i>Uniform Culture</i>	3.2857	3.975

¹ The actual scores of each student and the averages for each statement are recorded in the Microsoft Excel documents attached as appendices to this document.

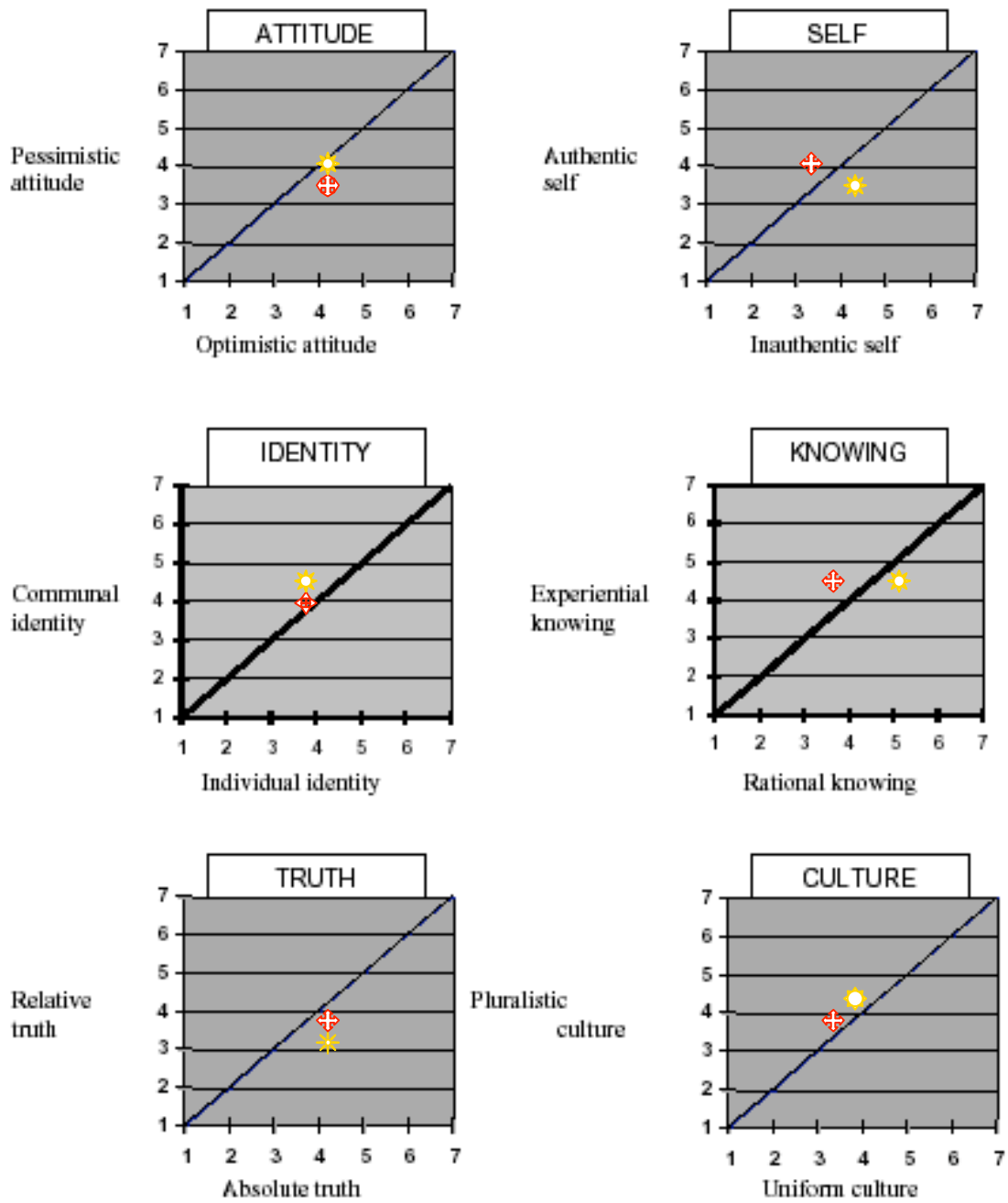




Chart 3: The averages of the German  and French  students were plotted on the above Dimension graphs. The horizontal axis represents the modern paradigm the vertical the postmodern paradigm.

Research analysis

Over all the most surprising to me was the similarities found between the two groups, in fact in all but two dimensions, Self and Knowing, they were nearly identical. It is necessary to look at distinct statements in order to get a clearer understanding of the subtle differences. For the analysis, I would like to 1) make observations on particular statements, 2) discuss the two most contrasting dimensions, 'Self' and 'Knowing'.

1) Statements of strong² and consistent agreement: (See Appendix 1: German/French Answers for questions and scores)

- 23/29: This pair of statements indicates that the students of Europe have little faith in the social structures that would maintain security in their worlds.
- 47/48 and 40: Since the students were Christians, this is an expected answer. The response of the non-Christian world would most likely be the opposite.
- 45/46: The concept of 'being myself' was important to both cultures, however the contrary, knowing how to act in the proper way, was equally important to the French.³ Obviously, they do not find the two contradictory.
- 16/21: In the financially driven world of Europe, this is an interestingly high number. Is this affected at all by the fact that the students are Christian?
- 30/34: The Christian ethics of the participants probably influenced the response to question 30. Statement 34, although intended to demonstrate a bias towards individuality could indicate instead a new concept of community that is not restricted by ethnicity.

² By strong I am meaning that the question was answered either with a 1 or 2 (a definite lack of identification with the statement) or a 6 or 7 (a very positive identification).

³ See the discussion of these questions in the following section "Self: Authentic vs. Inauthentic"

- 52/4, 18/14 and 40: Again these probably reflect Christian ethics, and would need to be compared to a larger and secular body of students to understand fully the significance of these questions.

2) Contrasting Dimensions:

Self: Authentic vs. Inauthentic

In the test, the Germans scored more 'authentic' than the French. Creps describes authenticity as the courage and self-disclosure to be yourself no matter what, whereas inauthentic is playing predetermined roles (father, professor, evangelical.) (Creps 2001, 7) If the understanding of the postmodern generation has to do with casting off roles that have been assigned to them, then they are becoming more egalitarian, but not necessarily more authentic. Is Mother Teresa more authentic than Billy Graham? Does the job we do or the roles we play determine our authenticity?

Psychologically, authenticity is defined as a person's ability to know one's true core self and live in such a way that reflects that core. It means acting in "accord with one's values, preferences, and needs as opposed to acting merely to please others or to attain rewards or avoid punishments, even if it means acting "falsely." (Goldman and Kernis 2002)

There is most probably a confusion of two different but interrelated aspects in this question; one has to do with cultures that value hierarchy and defined roles rather than egalitarianism and the other with psychology of knowing and being yourself.⁴

Suppositions 7, 20 and 47 would be the crossover questions between the two.

Chuck Smith, a self-acclaimed babyboomer pastor desiring to minister to

⁴ For a clear explanation of cultures valuing hierarchy versus egalitarianism, see Cultural Theory, Boulder: Westviewpress. 1990 by Michael Thompson, Richard Ellis and Aaron Wildavsky.

postmoderns asked a group of potential leaders what it meant to be authentic. The response was “We can’t stand posers, people pretending to be something they’re not.” “To be true to yourself, who you are on the inside”. (Smith 2001,154) According to Smith’s findings, most probably the pink haired punkers in Berlin would consider themselves authentic.

A final and important observation: statements 33 and 26 are practically a mirror image of each other, and yet the Germans fairly consistently gave equally high scores to each statement. Whereas I would see them as ‘either/or’ or ‘neither/nor’ statements, the Germans saw them as ‘both/and’. A true sign of postmodernity!

Knowing: Experiential vs. Rational

This is the second of the two categories that the French and Germans were on opposite sides of the modern/postmodern line. Because of the more emotional nature of French, I had expected that French would be experiential and Germans more rational in their knowing styles. Surprisingly, it was the French who had the highest average on all but one of the ‘rational knowing’ questions.

Knowing under modernity was factual, value-free and neutral, and these orderly, independent facts were available for any person to analyze and possess, and under modernity, this was the hope of solving the problems of the world (Bosch 1991, 266). Therefore, schools and systems in the modern world were created to teach and to learn analytically, understanding the parts first and then relating the parts to the whole (Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter 2003, 60). Probably every participant in the Pomo Profile has attended or is attending school that is based on the modern analytical and rational methods of knowing and has given a large portion of his/her life to succeed in it.

However, along with the rest of the western world, they find it inadequate. “The narrow enlightenment perception of rationality has, at long last, been found to be an inadequate cornerstone on which to build one’s life. The objectivist framework imposed on rationality has had a crippling effect on human inquiry; it has led to disastrous reductionism and hence to stunted human growth.” (Bosch 1991, 352-353)

To say that postmoderns “think with their feelings” (see pomo test) does not adequately explain a European view of “experiential knowing”. Learning involves relationship and participation in a meaningful context. I don’t believe that there has been an abandonment of analytical discovery (notice that the scores are very near the median line), rather it does not hold a position of primacy that it has in the past. During the postmodern class, taught by Curt Harlow in a very postmodern way, the Germans in the class enjoyed it but they also desired factual background that enabled them to analyze the whole. Bosch states, “True rationality thus also includes experience.” (Ibid. 1991, 353)

The French in the CSM classroom setting, were much more prepared to let the teacher explain the facts, and had to be encouraged to think beyond preaching in relationship to Bible study groups.⁵ This could also be closely connected with the higher averages of the French on statements 7/20 referring to spiritual leaders. If the French are less postmodern concerning inauthentic self and roles, then it would follow that they would have a greater ‘respect’ for the teacher and the “modern” way of learning.

Limitations and Suggestions

The Pomo Profile was written by Americans for Americans. From this fact, two questions arise:

⁵ See Powerpoint on Bible Study which is a document attached to this paper.

1. These dimensions are all cross-cultural therefore they may not give a prognosis on the degree of postmodernism in all cultures, unless we narrow the definition of postmodernism to these 6 dimensions. A country like Italy could have already a 'communal' identity in its traditional/modern context, and the postmodern response to that would be to become more individual. Or perhaps the whole definition of communal/individual is changing so radically that the suppositions do not apply.

2. Some of the statements are hardly understandable to a European mindset even if translated into their language, and to find cultural equivalents is not always simple (see question 15 for an example: "Bad tippers should not say grace in restaurants.") It would be good to have an international team of students rework the test, making it as internationally applicable as possible. One of the great applications of the test could be cross-cultural comparisons.

In my study, the test was given to students at a Christian conference, and all the participants were Christian. That would obviously influence the response to statements such as number 48 (I don't fully understand God, but I believe in God's love for me.), but there are surely subtle influences throughout. The Pomo Profile should be given to a wide range of students on several campuses in several countries and compare the results.

Conclusions Application to CSM

French and German, two distinct cultures in language and cultural expressions, and yet they ranked so closely together on the Pomo Profile that it was difficult to chart. They both hung close to the median between modernism and postmodernism. One could observe this tension as the two weeks progressed. They appreciated the pluralistic

multicultural setting, and yet were most comfortable in their homogenous group; they loved experiential learning experiences, and begged their teachers to ‘give me the facts.’ Their distinctness in the classroom and indeed during the whole time of interaction was always startling.

For future CSM’s it is important to note the following:

1. Professors and teachers must be prepared to use a multiplicity of teaching styles in order to touch every student from every cultural background. The teaching cannot be either experiential or rational, it must be both.

2. More thought must be given to the cultural pluralism that is present at the conference, combined with communal identity. The students desire both the diversity and the unity, but need activities (and plenty of translators) to help them build the bridge between the different nationalities.

3. The Pomo Profile showed that the Christian student is an optimistic believer in an absolute Truth. He/She needs to be given tools to express and validate their beliefs in the world of pessimism and relativity. A future conference that Biblically grounded what it means to be a Christian in each of these six dimensions would be very relevant.

4. Our students, especially those who find Christ on campus, will need eventually begin relating to a national church that is most likely traditional and modern. We must develop ways to build this bridge so that the student after graduation can find a church family and so that the traditional church can become relevant to the postmodern society.

German/French

Optimistic vs. Pessimistic

- 4.3 ___ 3.2 ___ 11. I am not worried about my future and/or the future of those around me.
- 3.6 ___ 3.2 ___ 5. I am greatly concerned about what the future will look like for my friends and me.
- 4.5 ___ 4.7 ___ 19. When I have to make a decision, I am confident that things will work

- out.
- 4.9 ___ 5.1 ___ 24. When facing decisions, I seek the counsel of friends and family, because I tend to worry about the outcome.
- 2.6 ___ 2.5 ___ 23. I believe that if international political and religious leaders work together the world can know peace and unity.
- 5.6 ___ 6.1 ___ 29. The political and religious problems of the world will continue to deteriorate harmony and peace.
- 4.4 ___ 5.0 ___ 25. I am confident that things will work out in the end, even if my significant relationships are not perfect.
- 2.3 ___ 3.7 ___ 31. When I am in a meaningful relationship, I am always wondering when it's going to end.
- 6.8 ___ 6.8 ___ 48. I don't fully understand God, but I believe in God's love for me.
- 1.6 ___ 1.4 ___ 47. I will never understand God, and am unsure about God's love for me.

Authentic Self vs. Inauthentic Self

- 2.9 ___ 2.0 ___ 6. Mother Teresa is a better model of Christianity than Billy Graham.
- 3.6 ___ 3.4 ___ 1. When I'm sick I would be unlikely to go to others for help and support.
- 4.8 ___ 2.9 ___ 53. I am likely to vote for political candidates from more than one party affiliation in the same election.
- 2.8 ___ 4.0 ___ 7. I do not want to know the flaws of those I consider spiritual leaders.
- 3.0 ___ 3.5 ___ 15. Bad tippers should not say grace in restaurants.
- 1.7 ___ 3.2 ___ 20. I would have trouble calling a spiritual leader by her or his first name.
- 4.8 ___ 4.0 ___ 33. I generally feel comfortable enough to share my struggles with others.
- 4.4 ___ 3.7 ___ 26. I am not quick to let others know who I really am inside.
- 5.6 ___ 6.1 ___ 45. I intend to "be myself" no matter what situation I am in.
- 3.9 ___ 6.5 ___ 46. In any situation the most important thing is to know the proper way to act.

Communal vs. Individual Identity

- 4.2 ___ 4.1 ___ 49. I dread the idea of going on a vacation alone.
- 3.8 ___ 3.5 ___ 50. I am comfortable making career decisions without consulting my parents or peers.
- 4.4 ___ 4.2 ___ 12. I would much rather win a team championship than an individual award.

4.7 ___ 4.1 ___ 9. I insist on being considered as an individual rather than as a member of a group.

5.6 ___ 5.3 ___ 16. I would refuse a promotion if it meant losing friends.

1.3 ___ 1.5 ___ 21. If I won the lottery I would keep all the winnings for myself.

1.6 ___ 2.1 ___ 30. I would rather lie than risk being ostracized.

5.3 ___ 5.8 ___ 34. I would marry outside my ethnicity if I loved the person enough.

4.6 ___ 5.2 ___ 44. On a day off I would rather go on a picnic with friends than read a book by myself

4.0 ___ 4.4 ___ 43. My political opinions tend to very independent from those of my friends or family

4.0 ___ 4.2 ___ 8. How I feel about something determines whether it is right or wrong for me.

4.8 ___ 5.6 ___ 2. I need all the facts before I make a decision.

4.6 ___ 3.4 ___ 51. I am drawn to things I cannot explain.

3.3 ___ 4.7 ___ 59. I never let emotions keep me from making the right decision.

Experiential knowing vs. Rational knowing

4.3 ___ 4.4 ___ 17. If there is a conflict between my head and my heart, I choose my heart.

5.5 ___ 5.4 ___ 22. I am willing to change my mind when confronted with superior logic or evidence.

4.7 ___ 3.9 ___ 27. I respond to situations intuitively.

2.6 ___ 4.4 ___ 54. I feel uncomfortable talking about ethical gray zones.

4.5 ___ 5.2 ___ 42. I believe in things I can't fully explain with facts or reasoning.

4.2 ___ 6.0 ___ 41. I'm willing to commit to something once I understand it fully.

6.2 ___ 6.9 ___ 52. Lying is always wrong.

2.6 ___ 1.5 ___ 4. I would steal to feed my family.

5.6 ___ 5.2 ___ 18. I would tell the truth even if it made a friend uncomfortable.

Absolute Truth vs. Relative Truth

2.0 ___ 2.5 ___ 14. I would confess to a crime I did not commit if it would keep me out of a prison sentence.

3.1 ___ 3.2 ___ 32. Two theologians with different opinions cannot both be right.

- 3.0 ___ 4.2 ___ 60. There is more truth in science than in art.
- 3.2 ___ 1.6 ___ 39. Every world religion has sacred writings that reflect God's thoughts.
- 6.2 ___ 4.7 ___ 36. Certain practices can be right in one setting and wrong in another.
- 4.2 ___ 5.8 ___ 38. There is a grand design to the universe that can be known.
- 4.9 ___ 5.1 ___ 37. Multiple interpretations of a spiritual principle can be true simultaneously.

- 2.4 ___ 3.1 ___ 3. In most situations there is only one appropriate way to act.
- 2.6 ___ 2.9 ___ 55. I enjoy combining different styles of clothing in the same outfit.

Uniform culture vs. Pluralistic culture

- 1.8 ___ 2.9 ___ 56. The culture in which I grew up represents the right way for people to live.
- 4.8 ___ 5.7 ___ 13. The diversity of cultures in the world is one of the very best things about the human race.
- 3.2 ___ 5.0 ___ 57. Always remaining true to the values we learn from our families is extremely important.
- 5.6 ___ 5.2 ___ 28. I could learn very important lessons from virtually every culture on earth.
- 2.6 ___ 2.5 ___ 35. The differences between cultures reveal that some are superior to others as a way of life
- 1.6 ___ 2.4 ___ 58. The idea that there is only one way to reach or know God is absurd.
- 6.3 ___ 6.4 ___ 40. The Bible is God's only written revelation to the human race.
- 4.8 ___ 4.5 ___ 10. A person who is sincerely seeking to understand God knows more about faith than most religious leaders.

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